

# View from the Longhouse:

## Hundreds unite in peace and friendship against shale gas



Hundreds of people turn their backs on the New Brunswick Legislature during a protest against shale gas development on November 5. Photo by Liane Thibodeau.

By NAJAT ABDOU-McFARLAND

Fredericton - The Unity and Solidarity Rally Against Shale Gas at the opening of the Legislature on November 5 brought people from many corners of the province together in peace and friendship. Two weeks before, on October 17, the RCMP had violently raided the blockade of SWN Resources' seismic exploratory trucks in Rexton, east of Moncton, arresting forty people, many of them Indigenous Mi'kmaq land defenders.

Hundreds of anti-shale gas activists from Elsipogtog, Tobique, Saint John, Moncton and Sackville were present at the rally as well as representatives from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Fredericton District Labour Council, the Council of Canadians and other organizations.

Those who attended the rally wanted to make sure that Premier David Alward heard what they had to say as he arrived at the Legislature. Mark D'Arcy, a familiar face in the anti-shale gas movement in Fredericton, welcomed the rally-goers and asked them to turn their backs to the Legislature and towards a tradition that models true democracy: the Longhouse.

Longhouses are traditional structures of indigenous visioning where decisions affecting the Wabanaki people and territory are discussed. For 11 days, from October 26 to November 5, the Longhouse that was erected near the

and vision for the future: "SWN: your measures to instil fear in the Warriors, Sikniktuk (Elsipogtog) women and children, and allies will fail."

Nolan outlined a vision for sustenance of the people of Sikniktuk, where the people subsist off the bounty of their traditional territory, harvesting trees and fishing in the rivers, lakes and streams: "The forests and the water will be cared for by the people, allowed to regenerate and produce true riches for the people who live here; clean air and water, respectfully harvested trees, careful fishing and no more poisons or senseless waste of what Creator gave us so that we can have good lives and care for the earth with love and respect for generations to come."

St. Mary's Chief, Candice Paul, expressed dismay at the Premier for not agreeing to meet with her and the Maliseet Grand Council, asserting that governments cannot proceed with natural resource extraction in any territory without getting the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples.

*Najat Abdou-McFarland is an environmental activist living in Fredericton.*



Protesters at the November 5 anti-shale gas rally express their solidarity with the Indigenous land defenders who were arrested in Rexton on October 17. Photo by Liane Thibodeau.

## El changes will drive up low-wage end of labour market

(continued from page 1) ...Liberals reduced benefits to 55 per cent of salaried earnings, cut maximum weekly benefits from \$448 to \$413 and introduced a qualifying calculation based on hours of work rather than weeks of work, causing many to lose eligibility.

Yet, the roots of the recent EI changes go even deeper. Workman describes how after wages rose steadily post-World War II, neoliberal restructuring in the 1970s eventually reduced the tolerance for such gains.

"The main concern was that the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program (predecessor of EI) was creating for workers too much latitude ... driving up the low-end wage market. This was generally inconsistent with the idea of seeing wages either stagnate or fall. The view from the business class, was that wages could no longer be allowed to rise. By the 1990s (under the Chrétien Liberals), there was enough momentum to take a run at EI. At a point when the number of unemployed workers was rising, we saw for the first time a decrease in the number of EI recipients. The number of unemployed people receiving EI fell from more than two-thirds to about one-third," argues Workman.

What does the job market facing unsupported, unemployed people look like? For some, nothing.

"The number of people frequenting and using food banks has been on the rise for years. I'm willing to make the assumption that the number of people on social assistance is also going up. If you have no job, no EI benefits, you (still) need to make ends meet," says Colford.

For others, it looks like a revolving door. According to Statistics Canada, the number of temporary workers in Canada hit a record two million last year. The largely low-waged work of this fleeting variety has been tripled compared with the growth of permanent work since 2008. This trend fits neatly with what Workman identifies as a goal of the EI changes, to "flood the low wage sector in Canada as much as possible."

But as protests against the EI changes over the past year have shown, workers are not taking such deprivations lightly. It may be a long winter indeed.

*Asaf Rashid is an organizer with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Fredericton Chapter.*

# In Brief

- The New Brunswick provincial **court denied Elsipogtog First Nation's injunction** against SWN's shale gas operations in their territory on November 18. After the hearing the ruling, Elsipogtog Chief Arren Sock reported that he does not intend to give up the struggle to find another way to support his people against shale gas. On November 10, Mike Connors, a lawyer for SWN Resource, visited one of the highway sites near SWN's exploration area and offered a deal: SWN will drop charges against the people named in SWN's lawsuit against the protest if SWN is allowed to carry out seismic testing for the next 14 days. Everyone at the protest campsite refused.
- Andrea Bear Nicholas, a Wolastoqik defender of **native languages** from Tobique, opined in November that, "The Maliseet language may have barely five years of viability left unless something different is done very soon. Indeed, only three of some 60 languages indigenous to Canada are forecast to survive to the end of this century unless something very different is done soon. The reality is that as long as young Aboriginal people are forced to attend schools conducted only in English or French, even those with Aboriginal language programs, the destruction of our languages will continue just as effectively, and maybe even more so, than it did in residential schools. And it will not be either a natural decline or a natural death."
- Seattle elected a **socialist to city council** in November. Kshama Sawant, a 41-year-old college economics professor, is the first socialist to be elected in Seattle in over 100 years. Sawant was a key figure in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Sawant was elected on a platform that supports an increase in the minimum wage to \$15; rent control in the city; and taxing millionaires to help fund a public transit system and other services. In Chile, Camila Vallejo, a 25-year-old **communist won a seat in Congress**, also in November. Vallejo was a figure in the student uprising in 2011 that demanded free and improved education.
- Lone Pine, a Canadian gas company, filed a \$250 million lawsuit against the Canadian government related to **Quebec's fracking ban** in the St. Lawrence River in September. Though the energy company's operations are based almost exclusively in Canada, the company is chartered in Delaware and so is able to take advantage of a provision in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that allows companies to sue foreign governments for allegedly violating certain provisions of the trade deal, specifically NAFTA's investor protections and provisions against indirect expropriations.

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